

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

1. (Previously presented) A suturing instrument comprising:
 - a handle;
 - a shaft having a proximal end and a distal end with an opening, a first island and a second island;
 - a first channel adapted to guide suture wire toward the opening and having a curved portion adapted to impart a bend to suture wire passed therethrough such that the suture wire begins to form a wire loop suture upon exiting the opening;
 - a second channel adapted to receive suture wire after the suture wire has exited the opening;
 - a wire drive adapted to move the suture wire in the first channel and through material to be sutured; and
 - a cutter adapted to cut the suture wire so as to free the wire loop suture from suture wire remaining in the instrument and bend each end of the wire loop suture around one of the first island and the second island.
2. (Previously presented) A suturing instrument according to claim 1 wherein the cutter is further adapted to direct the wire loop suture away from the first and second channels in a lateral direction.
3. (Previously presented) A suturing instrument according to claim 1 wherein the second channel includes a curved surface adapted to contact the suture wire.
4. (Previously presented) A suturing instrument according to claim 1 wherein the distal end includes a recess adapted to receive the material to be sutured.
5. (Previously presented) A suturing instrument according to claim 1 wherein the distal end includes at least one projection adapted to engage the material to be sutured.

6. (Previously presented) A suturing instrument according to claim 5 wherein the distal end includes two projections extending away from the distal end and adapted to engage material to be sutured.
7. (Previously presented) A suturing instrument according to claim 6 wherein one of the projections is longer than another of the projections.
8. (Previously presented) A suturing instrument according to claim 1 wherein the cutter comprises a cutting face adapted to cut the suture wire; a relief face adapted to bend each end of the wire loop suture around one of the first island and the second island; and an ejection ramp face adapted to direct the wire loop suture away from the first and second channels in a lateral direction.
9. (Previously presented) A suturing instrument according to claim 8 wherein the cutter includes an ejection push face adapted to push the wire loop suture distally after the wire loop suture has been directed away from the first and second channels.
10. (Previously presented) A suturing instrument according to claim 1 wherein the material to be sutured includes tissue.
11. (Previously presented) A suturing instrument according to claim 1 wherein the material to be sutured includes both mesh and tissue.
12. (Canceled)
13. (Previously presented) A suturing instrument according to claim 1 further comprising:
a passageway that provides a pathway for the cutter, the passageway disposed between the first island and the second island, wherein the first and the second islands are each separated from the passageway by at least a distance equal to a width of the suture wire.

14. (Previously presented) A suturing instrument according to claim 1 wherein the first channel and the second channel are undercut so as to help retain the suture wire in the first channel and the second channel, respectively.

15. (Previously presented) A suturing instrument according to claim 1 wherein the wire drive is adapted to advance a predetermined length of suture wire.

16. (Previously presented) A suturing instrument according to claim 1 wherein the wire drive and the cutter are sequentially activated by a single element.

17. (Previously presented) A suturing instrument according to claim 1 wherein the second channel has a geometry adapted to retain the suture wire therein until after the suture wire has been cut and partially bent.

18. (Previously presented) A suturing instrument according to claim 1 wherein the cutter cuts the suture wire so as to form a sharp point.

19. (Previously presented) A suturing instrument according to claim 1 wherein the shaft is detachable from the handle so as to allow a different shaft to be mounted to the handle.

20. (Previously presented) A suturing instrument according to claim 1 further comprising: a wire supply cartridge adapted to store the suture wire being provided to said first channel.

21- 37. (Canceled)

38. (Currently amended) A method of forming a wire loop suture, the method comprising: driving deformable suture wire through a curved portion of a first channel of a suturing instrument;

bending the suture wire in the curved portion such that upon exiting a distal end of the instrument a leading end of the suture wire initially moves away from all any portions of the instrument and follows a curved trajectory to return to the distal end to form the wire loop suture;

receiving the leading end in a second channel at the distal end as the suture wire returns thereto;

cutting the suture wire to separate a trailing end of the wire loop suture from suture wire remaining in the suturing instrument; and

bending the trailing end and the leading end inward toward a center of the wire loop suture.

39. (Currently amended) A suturing instrument comprising:

a means for driving deformable suture wire through a curved portion of a first channel of a suturing instrument;

a means for bending the suture wire in the curved portion such that upon exiting a distal end of the instrument a leading end of the suture wire initially moves away from all any portions of the instrument and follows a curved trajectory to return to the distal end to form the wire loop suture;

a means for receiving the leading end in a second channel at the distal end as the suture wire returns thereto;

a means for cutting the suture wire to separate a trailing end of the wire loop suture from suture wire remaining in the suturing instrument; and

a means for bending the trailing end and the leading end inward toward a center of the wire.

40. (Previously presented) The suturing instrument of claim 39, wherein the means for bending also bends a leading end of the wire loop suture inward toward a center of the wire loop suture.